



There is a spirit in the woods

12/15

Mary Lou Hess

# Thin Places

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**WESTMINSTER**  
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## Journeying Together . . .

by Carol and Rick Weber

Carol:

As I journey life's path I am lead deeper into mystery. Things I have been certain of are now less clear. I notice shadows and darkness in the reflections of long cherished lights of truth. I walk toward glimmers of hope. I stumble into joy and opportunities for growth.

One journey led me to sign up for a 10 day Intensive Centering Prayer retreat. Being an extravert, the idea of a silent retreat seemed unattractive, if not impossible. Yet, my internal longing for a deeper relationship with the Beloved led me to choose just this situation. Aside from talking at the evening meals, I was immersed in silence. I sat in prayer, listening, aware only by peeking that there were twenty other people in the room with me. I practiced letting go of the multiple thoughts that drift through my attention. I was told just to open myself to God's love. And wait.

A number of days into the retreat I experienced a shift deep within me, a calmness I never knew possible. I was also graced with a sense of "oneness" with nature around me and with everyone else in the human family. It was strangely wonderful to experience God in silence, no-thingness. No music, no organ, no movement, no readings. Not my agenda. I understood for the first time how some people could survive horrible situations and maintain an inner sense of peace and hope.

My deepest desire on my way back home was to share my retreat experience and this way of prayer with my husband, Rick, who had been home with the kids while I was in the moun-

**"In the forest  
was a path  
which led on  
and on,  
as if access  
to a deeper realm—  
a place where peripherals,  
the eddies  
at the edge of things,  
were all forgotten,  
and I entered  
a silence of green . . .  
moving through stillness."**

Dorothy Walters

*Journeying Together* continues on page 2

**Look for *Thin Places* at: [www.thinplaces.us](http://www.thinplaces.us) or [www.ewestminster.org/thinplaces.asp](http://www.ewestminster.org/thinplaces.asp)**

tains. He was a bit less enthusiastic. But his interest grew by living with me in the days and months that followed.

Since I now have a spiritual practice opening to contemplative prayer, I have recognized internal changes. I am more receptive to other people's journey of encountering the Sacred. I listen more to the Spirit that dwells within me. I've learned to be even more tolerant of my failings, that the spiritual journey is not a success story. I feel I am missing something when I don't pray. Perhaps it is those days of no prayer that are the strongest pull to come back and begin again. As God called Hosea, I am also invited by the Spirit to "come back to Me with all your heart. Don't let fear keep us apart."

In her book, *There Was No Path So I Trod One*, Edwina Gately includes a poem, "Let Your God Love You":

Be silent  
Be still  
Alone  
Empty  
Before your God.  
Say nothing  
Be silent  
Be still  
Let your God  
Look upon you  
That is all.  
God knows  
And understands.  
God loves you with  
An enormous love  
Wanting only to  
Look upon you  
With Love.  
Quiet.  
Still.  
Be.  
Let your God  
Love you.

Do you know of anyone who might like to receive  
*Thin Places?* It's sent free to all who request it.  
Or do you know of an up-coming "Opportunity"  
that might be of interest to others?  
If so, please contact Kathy Fisher:  
kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421

Rick:

Over forty years ago one of my girlfriends left a greeting card on the windshield of my car. It read, "To love another in the highest sense of the word is to wish them the eternal possession of God—and lead them to it."

I was smart enough to ask that woman to become my wife.

Carol has remained a graceful helpmate on my spiritual journey. In recent years she and I have become interested and active in staffing retreat experiences for others on the spiritual journey, particularly those who are ready to examine the contemplative traditions of their faith.

Such retreats are a movement away from lectures and scripture study (both "head" based movements) toward a more vulnerable place, that closet place of Mark's Gospel where one is alone with God, waiting, listening, accepting, yielding [6:6]. This is my "heart" place and I find it a different place, a complementary place. I have since learned it is also my natural place of psychological comfort.

But I have to admit that Contemplative Prayer and the Spiritual Journey are not much built around my comfort. They are built around my willingness to be someone who knows, loves, and serves God. With that willingness comes something much better than comfort, something called peace, or better, peacefulness because I am more aware of the constant infusion of grace in the moment. That doesn't insulate me from frustration, irritation, anger and greed and that lot, and certainly not from pride and self-deceit. But I have better tools with which to turn again towards Love.

For me, one of the richest aspects of these retreats is the companionship of a community in contemplative silence. At first glance this can seem an unlikely linkage if most of one's spiritual practice is ritual liturgy, musical praise and preached scripture. But companionship certainly does occur and people often comment about it during retreat closing sessions.

As a result of my experience, I am interested in encouraging others to seek and experience contemplative retreats. Not everybody may feel that they have the time to do so, but-like the spiritual journey itself-thinking about it, preparing for it, creates an openness to take advantage of opportunity. If God wants you to experience this, and you are open, it will happen.

At least in my experience, the steps from openness to action regarding contemplation as prayer can be greatly

*Journeying Together* continues on page 3

enhanced by retreats emphasizing silence and guidance, retreats that have a time for contemplative practice and a time for asking: “When and where and how often do I do this?” “How do I prepare myself intellectually, emotionally and physically?” “Where can I be exposed to models of encouragement?”

The advantage of such a retreat is the compression of all such questions into an experience . . . rather than knowledge about an experience. One can be led deeper into the mystery.

“Let your God love you.  
Be silent.  
Be still. . . .”

*Carol is a Spiritual Director and Coordinator for Contemplative Outreach in Minnesota. Rick is a retired physician. They live in Staples, Minnesota, but spend much time in the Twin Cities being Grandma and Grandpa. They may be reached at rcwebbers@brainerd.net.*

## ONE TIME OPPORTUNITIES

### **Do You Have a Thin Place Story to Share?**

Mary Treacy O’Keefe is collecting stories for a sequel to her book, *Thin Places: Where Faith is Affirmed and Hope Dwells*. If you think you might like to submit a story about a significant spiritual experience in your life, please contact her at: [mary.treacy.okeefe@gmail.com](mailto:mary.treacy.okeefe@gmail.com) or visit: [www.marytreacyokeefe.com](http://www.marytreacyokeefe.com) for more information.

### **Special Appreciation is Offered**

to the Centering Prayer groups that meet at St. Olaf Catholic Church in downtown Minneapolis which begin their fifteenth year this month (April). For information: [sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com](mailto:sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com).

### **Appreciation Also**

to the House of Prayer in the City, which is in its first year and which offers a quiet place “for individuals to come for a silent break from an otherwise busy schedule. It is a comfortable place to read, reflect, meditate, pray, or have a conversation over a cup of tea.” Each Friday, for example, City House offers:

Open House, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Lectio Divina, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Contemplative Practice, 12:15 to 12:45 p.m.

Wisdom Circle, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

For information: [catherine.bergeron@yahoo.com](mailto:catherine.bergeron@yahoo.com) or [houseprayer@cbsju.edu](mailto:houseprayer@cbsju.edu).

### **The Ecumenical ARC Retreat Community**

has openings for adult resident volunteers for shorter or longer periods. Located 55 miles north of Minneapolis on 90 wooded acres, ARC is an intentional community offering space and silence for discernment and service as its members share a simple, sustainable, spiritual lifestyle. The community serves individuals and groups seeking time apart, rest, and renewal.

Room and board are provided for volunteers who stay for up to three months. A stipend and health insurance are provided for longer commitments. For information contact Jan at [director@arcretreat.org](mailto:director@arcretreat.org) or 763.689.3540 or see: [www.arcretreat.org](http://www.arcretreat.org).

### **The Spiritual Journey: Is Your Spiritual Life Improving the World?**

The Center for Action and Contemplation invites you to a Palm Sunday afternoon lecture by recognized theologian and teacher, Fr. Richard Rohr.

Today’s society is rife with partisanship, polarization, and tribalism. What can we do as people of faith to add something good to our world? to build true Community across our “socially defined” communities? to become World?

Fr. Rohr will emphasize—as Holy Week begins—that we must follow Jesus’ example and journey. He never asked that we worship Him; He asked that we follow Him.

Fr. Rohr will challenge us to look faithfully and honestly at our own spiritual journeys and how we can “live” more fully for the world we all inhabit.

### **The Pilgrim Path**

**“Thus says the Lord:**

**Stand at the crossroads, and look,  
and ask for the ancient paths,  
where the good way lies; and walk in it,  
and find rest for your souls.”**

*Jeremiah 6:16*

**“Stand at the crossroads and look.**

**Ask from the ancient paths**

**Which was the good way—take it**

**And you will find rest for yourselves.”**

*Jeremiah 6:16*

as quoted by Mary Minehan, CSB

**Sunday, April 1, 3:00 to 5:15 p.m.**

University of St. Thomas, O'Shaughnessy  
Education Center

NE corner of Cretin and Summit, St. Paul

For information or registration: [info@cacradicalgrace.org](mailto:info@cacradicalgrace.org)  
or 505.242.9588 or [www.cacradicalgracke.org](http://www.cacradicalgracke.org).

**Holy Week Retreat**

Plan your own retreat coupled with the richness of monastic prayer and liturgy during Holy Week. Books, tapes and videos are available.

**Sunday, April 1, at 7:00 p.m. to**

**Friday April 6, at 4:00 p.m.**

also

**Taizé Prayer Service**

This ecumenical hour of prayer for peace, includes Scripture reading, sung prayer, and quiet time in an environment of icons, darkness and candlelight in the Monastery chapel.

**Saturday, April 21, 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.**

Sacred Heart Monastery, Richardton, ND

For information or registration: [ritakayosb@yahoo.com](mailto:ritakayosb@yahoo.com) or  
701.974.2121

**Spiritual Journey Program**

"A spiritual journey consists of many paths. It is a journey that reflects our desire for God and God's desire for us. It is a journey in which we seek companionship with the Holy and with one another. Though we walk many

paths, we all share in this common journey. We invite you to join us on your journey."

The Spiritual Journey Program at United Theological Seminary is ongoing and offers many paths. For example, the "Spiritual Arts" path offers:

**Phillip Brunelle on "Spirituality and Hymns"**

Brunelle, founder and artistic director of the renowned choral group VocalEssence, will share reflections on the role hymns play in our spiritual formation and the roles they have played in the spiritual deepening of the church.

**Thursday, April 12, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.**

also

The "Spirituality of Writing" path brings to campus writers and poets who have sought to find and been found by the sacred mystery introduced by the opening words of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word . . ." For example,

**Judith Guest on "The Spirituality of Writing"**

Judith Guest has been writing since she was about ten. She is the author of many books (including *Ordinary People* and *Second Heaven*), has written several screenplays, and is currently working on her newest book, *White is the Moon*.

**Tuesday, May 8, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.**

United Theological Seminary, in the Bigelow Chapel  
1000 Fifth Street NW, New Brighton

For information or registration: 651.255.6159 or  
[jsouhrada@unitedseminary.edu](mailto:jsouhrada@unitedseminary.edu) or  
[www.unitedseminary.edu](http://www.unitedseminary.edu).

**Casa del Sol Community of Ghost Ranch**

The Casa del Sol Community and Spirituality Center is the latest addition to the offerings at Ghost Ranch, a Retreat Center located on the high desert of northern New Mexico.

Philip Newell serves as the Companion/Theologian in Residence at Casa del Sol, coming to Ghost Ranch several times during the year and being in residence during July. During this month this year, he will help to define and to write the rule for the community and will—with his wife, Alison—lead daily prayers and Sunday worship. Together they will continue the process they helped begin in 2005 of Listening to the Voice of God in creation, and helping to fashion a Spiritual Community in the High Desert.

Many, many Opportunities are available at Casa del Sol and Ghost Ranch. Examples include:

**"Coming to Life in the Desert," April 16-21**

**"A Desert Pilgrimage," May 6-13** (especially recommended)

**The Pilgrim Path (con't)**

**"Thus says the Lord:  
Stand at the crossroads and look,  
And ask for the ancient paths  
Where the good way lies;  
And walk in it,  
And find rest for your souls."**

*Jeremiah 6:16*

as quoted by Michael Rodgers

**"Stand beside the earliest roads,  
Ask the pathways of old  
which is the good way, and walk it;  
Thus you will find rest for your souls."**

*Jeremiah 6:16*

as quoted in Glendalough: A Celtic Pilgrimage

**“Desert Wisdom,” June 11-17**

For information or registration for these or for the many other Opportunities: 505.982.8539 or robcraig@uswest.net or www.ghostranch.org.

**Courage for New Horizons: Inner Stillness, Prophetic Imagination**

It takes us so long to see where we are and even longer to see who we are, says John O’Donohue. But when your soul awakens, you begin to truly inherit your life. When you realize how precious your time here is, you no longer want undertakings that do not nourish your true self. You do want your work to become an expression of your gift. Presentation sponsored by Being in Concert Speaker Series.

John O’Donohue is an Irish poet and philosopher who lives in the solitude of a cottage in the West of Ireland, and who holds a Ph.D. in philosophical theology. His writings and seminars draw us into intimate conversation with neglected or unknown regions of the soul.

**Friday, April 20, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.-Saturday, April 21, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

Calhoun Beach Club, in the Solarium  
2900 Thomas Avenue South, Minneapolis  
For information or registration: 612.659.8248 or info@beinginconcert.org or www.beinginconcert.org.

**A Week with Esther de Waal**

The February/March issue contained details of “A Day with Esther de Waal: “The Celtic Way of Prayer” (Thursday, May 8, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., sponsored by Wisdom Ways and the Benedictine Center). Here are two more Opportunities to meet and hear this internationally known author and retreat leader.

**“Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict”**

Esther de Waal brings her deep study of the Rule of St. Benedict to this retreat that seeks to engage the hearts and imaginations in the challenge to live a life of constant conversion.

**Friday, May 4, at 7:00 p.m. to Sunday, May 6, at 11:00 a.m.**

also

**“A Benedictine Vision for Contemporary Life”**

In this lecture designed for the general public, Esther de Waal shows why people vastly different in the places and states in life find Benedictine’s vision of Christian life a steady light in these challenging times.

**Thursday, May 10, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

The Benedictine Center of St. Paul’s Monastery  
2675 Larpentour Avenue East, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.777.7251 or see benedictinecenter@stpaulmonastery.org.

**“Writing my way to inner healing . . . “**

Beryl Singleton Bissell is a former nun, the wife of a Lutheran minister, and the author of a book which won a “Star Tribune Best of 2006 Minnesota Authors” award. *The Scent of God* tells her story in spare, lyric language, a story that took her from a cloistered convent in New Jersey to the North Shore of Lake Superior, a powerful account that reaches beyond dogma to personal truth, a pilgrimage that changed not only Beryl but the lives of those whom she most loves.

All are invited to join Beryl for lunch, a presentation on the spiritual journey she embarked upon in response to a chance remark uttered by her teenage son, and an opportunity to ask your questions about the book or the talk.

Join us for lunch at Noon. Please do let us know that you’re coming so that we can set a place for you (you may pay when you arrive [\$7]). Or come for the program, beginning at about 12:30 p.m.

**Sunday, May 6, 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.**

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Meisel Room  
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis  
For information or a luncheon reservation: 612.866.8752 or kfisher@wpc-mpls.org.

**“God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
Then walks with us silently out of the night.**

**These are the words we hear dimly:**

**You, sent out beyond your recall,**

**Go to the limits of your longing.**

**Embody me.**

**Flare up like flame**

**And make big shadows I can move in.**

**Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.**

**Just keep going. No feeling is final.**

**Don't let yourself lose me.**

**Nearby is the country they call life.**

**You will know it by its seriousness.**

**Give me your hand.”**

Rainer Maria Rilke  
quoted by Krista Tippett in  
her new book, *Speaking of Faith*

**"Keep Holy the Sabbath"**

Spend a day learning, reflecting, practicing how to keep Sabbath in this culture, in this century, right here. Presentations on Centering Prayer and the "Traditional Meaning of Sabbath," plus time on your own and the fellowship of a shared lunch.

**Saturday, May 19, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

(additional Opportunities on: July 20, September 15, October 21)

Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Avenue South, Minneapolis

For information or registration: 612.822.2623 or [sabbathhouse@fslf.org](mailto:sabbathhouse@fslf.org).

**Interfaith Liturgy for Peace**

This Interfaith Gathering will bring together the diverse richness of our faith communities in music and prayers for world peace, including thoughts from the International Director of the Nonviolent Peaceforce, an international peace organization based in Minneapolis. Sponsored by the Center for Religious Inquiry.

**Thursday, May 24, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.**

St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral  
519 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis  
For information: 612.870.7800 or [pauls@OurCathedral.org](mailto:pauls@OurCathedral.org)

**Listening in Silence**

This week-end retreat will be based on the Quaker author and teacher Parker Palmer's writings with ample time for private and communal prayer, reflection and solitude. It will be a time to listen deeply to the quiet and to be surprised by a gentle voice.

Led by Joyce McFarland, a Spiritual Director who trained with Parker Palmer in the "Courage to Teach/Courage to Lead" program, and by Kathy Callaghan, a Spiritual Director and massage therapist.

**Friday, June 1, at 6:00 p.m. with supper—Sunday, June 3, at 1:00 p.m. after lunch**

The House of Prayer, Collegeville  
For information or registration: 320.363.3293 or [houseprayer@cbsjsu.edu](mailto:houseprayer@cbsjsu.edu) or see [www.ehouseofprayer.org](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org).

**"Where we had thought to travel outward,  
we will come to the center of our own existence.  
And where we had thought to be alone,  
we will be with all the world."**

Joseph Campbell

**Upper Midwest Labyrinth Festival, featuring Lauren Artress**

The Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, who was one of the earliest and remains one of the most important persons in the modern revival of interest in the labyrinth as a spiritual practice, will present a public lecture, "The Labyrinth Revival," on Friday; the keynote address, "The Labyrinth and Transformation" and a presentation, "Labyrinth Ceremonies for Life Passages" on Saturday; and a daylong workshop on "Opening the Divine Imagination: The Journey to Discover the Grail Castle" on Sunday. Other presenters will offer additional workshops.

**Friday, June 15, at 7:00 p.m. to Sunday, June 17, at 4:00 p.m.**

The Carondelet Center, Wisdom Ways  
Center for Spirituality

1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For additional details or registration: 651.696.2788 or [www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org).

For information on her separate June 18-19 Labyrinth Facilitator Training event: [robertas@veriditas.net](mailto:robertas@veriditas.net) or [www.veriditas.net](http://www.veriditas.net).

**Sweat & Silence, Summer 2007**

MICAH, in NW Minnesota, creates places where we live out a holistic vision of being in communion with God, with others, and with the earth. People come to MICAH to pray in the Prayer Center, to make retreats, to take classes in spiritual formation, to reflect on God's grace and the wonders of creation in the gardens and natural landscape, and (perhaps) to sleep in the Yurt on the banks of the Red Lake River.

**Sweat & Silence**, working retreats for individuals and groups, offer Five Days of Sweat (at least part of the time), Five days of Silence (during appropriate times each day), and Five Days of Spiritual Community (all the time, every day). Four dates are offered for the Summer of 2007—dates fill up, and you may wish to look into this soon.

**June 15-20, July 6-11, July 20-25 (Friday evening through Wednesday noon) & August 5-10 (Sunday evening through Friday noon)**

MICAH (Minnesota Institute of Contemplation and Healing), Crookston, MN

For information or registration: 218.281.4853 or [www.micahprays.org](http://www.micahprays.org).

### Loyola's 30th Birthday Party

The Loyola Spirituality Center happily invites you to a birthday party at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, close to Loyola's first home at St. Joseph's Hospital. There will be cake and musical entertainment by David Haas and some toasts by special guests.

What was that "something" Loyola set out to do in 1977? It was a time when people were searching for meaning in their lives, hungering for spirituality and reaching out in service, building community. Ordinary people were recognizing their invitation to holiness, their call to ministry in their world, their desire for companionship to help them integrate these aspects of their lives. Since then, thousands of people—of all ages, religious persuasions, orientations and economic background—have come and have been accompanied on their spiritual journeys, some for rather short periods, some for many, many years. Please come and help us celebrate.

**Sunday, June 24, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.**

Landmark Center

75 West 5th Street, St. Paul

For information about the party: 651.614.0008 or [terry@loyolasrr.org](mailto:terry@loyolasrr.org)

For information about the many services and retreat opportunities at Loyola: [www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org](http://www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org)

### Some Pilgrimage Opportunities

#### Iona—A Thin Place

Led by J. Philip Newell, a time for renewal within the "thin place" of Iona—June 15-22.

For information or registration: Kendall, [klkirkanfkendall521@cox.net](mailto:klkirkanfkendall521@cox.net)

#### Israel Study Tour

Have you ever dreamed of traveling to Israel, to talk and learn in the land that Jesus knew and loved? Sponsored by Christ Presbyterian Church, this is much more than a typical holy land tour—it is a pilgrimage and a study program with instructors from Jerusalem University College, as we travel from Dan to Beer Sheba—June 17-July 2.

For information or registration: Rev. Deb Kielsmeier, 952.920.8515, ext. 263

#### A Pilgrimage to Spain

Explore some of Spain's most popular pilgrimage sites, including Santiago de Compostela (the goal of the ancient pilgrimage road across northern Spain, in a region settled by the Celts), Montserrat (home of the Black Madonna), as well as Aspetia, Avila, and Segovia (where the Spanish

mystics Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross lived and wrote). We'll also visit the great cities of Salamanca, Barcelona, and Madrid, centers of Spanish education, culture, and art—July 13-26.

For information or registration: Dr. Ed Sellner, [ecsellner@stkate.edu](mailto:ecsellner@stkate.edu) or [Karol@americangrouptours.com](mailto:Karol@americangrouptours.com)

#### Pilgrimage to Italy and Spain

Sponsored by Christos Center, this pilgrimage will focus on spiritual practices in places dear to Francis and Clare of Assisi, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Expand your knowledge of these spiritual writers by pondering their works in the very places they were written. Join others for morning and evening prayers, meditation, lectures, and discussion both before and during the pilgrimage—2-15 November.

For information or registration: Rev. Dick Beckman, [rjbecklman@aol.com](mailto:rjbecklman@aol.com) or [www.gtd.org/tripshow.asp](http://www.gtd.org/tripshow.asp)

#### Unlearning . . . Acceptance

**"Love is what we are born with.  
Fear is what we have learned here.  
The spiritual Journey is the unlearning of fear  
And the acceptance of love back into our hearts."**

Marianne Williamson

*Afterwords*, continued from page 8

a booklet produced by Contemplative Outreach as a part of their Contemplative Life Program. Or see Chapter 13 in Cynthia Bourgeault's *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*. As both make clear, the welcoming prayer is truly radical, calling for a "radical departure from the world of resentment, righteousness, judgment . . . a world of duality where right/wrong, good/bad, rule our consciousness." And as both emphasize, the only way to understand this spiritual practice is to stop trying to understand it and to do it.

Perhaps we may all begin by seeking to say "welcome" to the sun and, especially, "welcome" to the cold; "welcome" to the friend and, especially, to the stranger; "welcome" to joy and even to sorrow.

Perhaps if we start to use the welcoming prayer with "small upsets," we can begin with "Every morning a new arrival" and begin to make welcoming an ongoing part of how we live each day.



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"Journeying Together . . ."  
Thursday, May 10. . .  
The Welcoming Prayer



## AFTERWORDS: The Welcoming Prayer

The Welcoming Prayer as a spiritual practice may be relatively new, but its essence—its encouragement of the welcoming way of living our lives each day—was captured by Rumi centuries ago in his poem, “The Guest House”:

This being human is a guest house  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture.

Still, treat each guest honorably,  
He may be cleaning you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
Because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond.

What if we were able to say, “Welcome,” to each moment, each experience, each feeling as it arises? We know what it is like when a good friend unexpectedly comes by, and our eyes light up and we smile our welcome. What if much of what we experience could feel like that?

But could it? Most of us seem to have two basic strategies on hand. If we think something will be good, we feel and respond in this way. If we think something will be bad, we are likely to feel or respond in that way. This seems sensible. It may be. Unless Hamlet was on to something when he observed that “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” Unless our up-front judgments and pre-dispositions actually affect, perhaps affect dramatically, how we experience what happens to us in life.

The Welcoming Prayer, as a disciplined spiritual practice, arose as a companion to Centering Prayer. “The reason that centering prayer is not as effective as it could be,” Thomas Keating writes, “is that when you emerge from it into the ordinary routines of daily life, your emotional programs start going off again.” Thus, the practice of the welcoming prayer evolved as a way of extending the intentionality of centering prayer into the rest of the day. “Simply put,” one who uses it reports, “the faithful practice of both centering prayer and the welcoming prayer is the one-two punch that helps me to embrace God in every moment—in every event.” The faithful practice of the welcoming prayer helps us be open to the love and presence of God throughout the day.

For more on the practice one may turn to *Welcoming Prayer*,

*Afterwords*, continues on page 7